

Message Text

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SUBJECT: FIRST MINISTERS CONFERENCE: B.C. PRESS REACTION

1. SUMMARY. VANCOUVER SUN EDITORIALY PRAISED THE FIRST MINISTERS CONFERENCE FOR MAKING A GOOD START ON ACHIEVING A COHERENT NATIONAL ECONOMIC POLICY AND WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE "ELOQUENCE" OF PREMIER BENNETT S PRESENTATIONS. IN SHARP CONTRAST, VANCOUVER PROVINCE FOUND THE CONFERENCE TO BE A FAILURE AND ONLY A FORUM FOR MORE OF PM TRUDEAU S "SOPHISTRY." PROVINCE QUESTIONED WHETHER FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES SHOULD EVER BE CONVENED FOR PURPOSES OTHER THAN SETTling AREAS OF CONTENTION OVER JURISDICTION. END SUMMARY.

2. VANCOUVER S TWO MAJOR NEWSPAPERS HAVE HAD TOTALLY DIFFERENT EDITORIAL REACTIONS TO LAST WEEK S FIRST MINISTERS CONFERENCE IN OTTAWA. THE VANCOUVER SUN DECLARED ON FEBRUARY 16 THAT "IT WAS THE FIRST TIME FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEADERS HAD COME TOGETHER TO SET THEIR SIGHTS ON AGREED OBJECTIVES FOR THE ECONOMF THE COUNTRY AND TO DESIGN WAYS OF PURSING THEM."

"AMAZINGLY," THE EDITORIAL STATED, "THEY AGREED, MR.

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LEVESQUE ASIDE." SUN NOTED THAT LEVESQUE PUT SEPARATISM ABOVE ECONOMIC RECOVERY BY REFUSING TO ASSOCIATE HIMSELF WITH THE FINAL COMMUNIQUE AND THEREBY MADE CLEAR "THE INDIVISIBILITY OF ECONOMICS AND NATIONAL UNITY."

3. SUN EDITORIAL APPLAUDED "THE HISTORIC SPECTACLE OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THIS COUNTRY, AT A TIME WHEN THEY

MIGHT HAVE FOUND IT POLITICALLY EXPEDIENT TO ATTACK OTTAWA FOR INFLATION THAT IS TOO HIGH AND UNEMPLOYMENT THAT IS TOO HIGH, INSTEAD SUPPORTING THE MONETARY AND FISCAL POLICIES OTTAWA IS FOLLOWING." "MORE SIGNIFICANT," THE SUN CONTINUED, "IS THE FACT THAT PRIVATE BUSINESS ... CAN FEEL GREATER CONFIDENCE THAT THE COUNTRY IS NOW ON A CLEAR, PREDICTABLE ECONOMIC COURSE." THE EDITORIAL CONCLUDED THAT "THE ENDORSEMENT BY PREMIERS FROM ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS, EXCEPT SEPARATIST, OF OTTAWA S TOUGH BUT SOUND POLICIES IS CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT THOSE POLICIES REST ON A SOLID BASE OF NATIONAL SUPPORT."

4. IN A COMPANION EDITORIAL OF THE SAME DATE, THE SUN LAVISHED PRAISE ON B.C. S PREPARATION FOR THE CONFERENCE AND ON PREMIER BENNETT S "ELOQUENCE" -- "HE HAS BEGUN DROPPING WATER ON THE STONE OF NATIONAL OPINION." EDITORIAL REPEATED TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL S ALLEGED PRONOUNCEMENT THAT BENNETT CHANGED B.C. S IMAGE "WITH ONE OF THE MOST PRECISE AND DETAILED ECONOMIC PROPOSALS THE POLITICAL WORLD OF CANADA HAS EVER SEEN."

5. IN SHARP CONTRAST, VANCOUVER PROVINCE EDITORIAL OF FEBRUARY 17 STATED THAT IF FIRST MINISTERS "WERE TO SAY REALLY WHAT WAS ON THEIR MINDS, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE CLOSE TO QUEBEC PREMIER RENE LEVESQUE S OPINION THAT THE AGREEMENTS WERE "JUST GOOD WISHES"" AND THAT TRUDEAU UNCLASSIFIED

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"WAS AT THE OLD GAME, TRYING BY THE SHEEREST SOPHISTRY TO TURN THE CONFERENCE S OBVIOUS FAILURE INTO A RINGING SUCCESS." ON B.C. S ROLE IN THE MEETING, PROVINCE CONCLUDED THAT BENNETT HAD "WASTED TIME" IN HIS "DILIGENT PREPARATION," ALTHOUGH HIS GOVERNMENT S "INTELLIGENT AND INSTRUCTIVE" PAPERS "DID REFLECT THE PREVAILING MOOD OF THE CONFERENCE."

6. IN MORE FUNDAMENTAL CRITICISM, THE PROVINCE WROTE THAT FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES SERVE MAINLY AS "GAB-FESTS" AND CONFUSE THE CANADIAN SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT. IN THE PROVINCE VIEW, ADMITTEDLY "SIMPLISTIC," FEDERAL MP S (REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS OF THEIR REGIONS), THE PRIME MINISTER AND OPPOSITION PARTY LEADERS SHOULD LOOK AFTER NATIONAL AFFAIRS AND MEMBERS OF PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES SHOULD STICK TO PROVINCIAL AFFAIRS ("WE DID NOT ELECT PREMIER BENNETT BECAUSE OF HIS VIEWS ON NATIONAL AFFAIRS"). THE EDITORIAL CONCLUDED WITH THIS ADMONITION: "SO LET US HAVE FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL CONFERENCES ONLY TO SETTLE AREAS OF CONTENTION OVER JURISDICTION."

7. PRESS CLIPPINGS BEING MAILED TO EMBASSY AND EUR/CAN.

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